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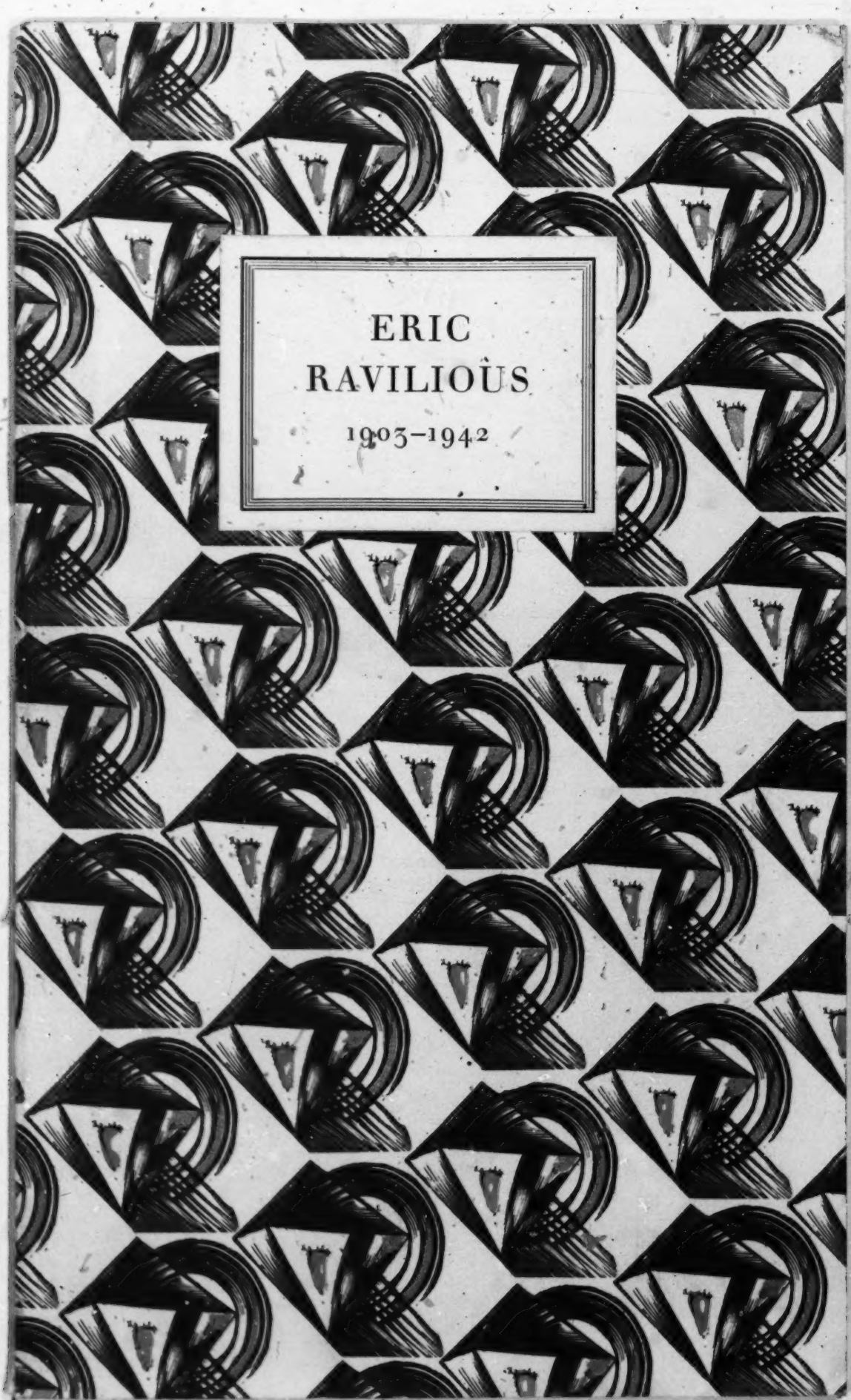

ERIC
RAVILIOUS
1903–1942

ERIC RAVILIOUS

1903 1942

A Memorial Exhibition of
Water-Colours
Wood-Engravings
Illustrations
Designs
&c.

THE ARTS COUNCIL OF
GREAT BRITAIN
1948–49

Foreword

During the summer of this year a memorial exhibition of the work of Eric Ravilious was held in the Art Galleries at Eastbourne and Brighton. In view of the great interest shown in this comprehensive collection of his work, the Arts Council has most willingly agreed to make this material, in a reduced form, available to the public for a further period, both in London and in the provinces. This has only been made possible by the willingness of the owners to prolong their loans, the generosity of the lenders of the pictures added to the Council's exhibition, and the co-operation of the artist's widow, Mrs. Swanzy, who has dated the pictures which, as shown here, represent about one-fifth of his total output. Thanks are also due to the Directors of the Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne, and the Brighton Art Gallery. The sympathetic and informative introduction has been written by the artist's close friend J. M. Richards. The engravings on pages seven and nine were designed for Messrs. John Murray and have kindly been lent by them. Those on the title and on page fourteen are used by courtesy of The Curwen Press.

P. J.

Introduction

Eric Ravilious was killed in 1942 while serving with the Royal Marines as a war-artist. He was in an aeroplane which left Iceland on a reconnaissance flight and never came back. He was then thirty-nine, and had a deservedly high reputation of several kinds: as one of the best of the artists responsible for the revival of wood-engraving in the late twenties and early thirties, as a water-colour painter whose very English, but very personal, talent was too often overshadowed by work more experimental in aim—Ravilious's own work was always experimental in technique—as a wall-painter, as an illustrator, and, in the last years of his life, as an industrial designer.

A memorial exhibition of his work was held this summer at the Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne, where Ravilious had his first art-school training, and at Brighton. The present exhibition consists of a selection of the work shown at these two places, concentrating on his water-colours and his wood-engravings. A few of his industrial designs are shown, too, but even without these it would be clear that, as well as being an artist with a personal vision, he had an unusual capacity as a designer. His training was indeed largely that of a designer, for after leaving Eastbourne in 1919 he studied in the Design School at the Royal College of Art. Among the instructors there who influenced him most was Paul Nash, another painter and illustrator whose sense of design was always close to the surface of his art. And after leaving the College, though he was always intermittently a painter, Ravilious earned his living as a designer in a great variety of materials. His most memorable work includes the wall-paintings he did at Morley College, London (1930)

and Morecambe (1932)—both now destroyed—numerous engraved book-illustrations, notably the magnificent edition of *Twelfth Night* (1932) and others for the Golden Cockerel Press, many engraved book-jackets, catalogue-covers and the like, display stands for exhibitions, lithographs, glassware, a set of furniture and a quantity of china. He also taught for several years at the Royal College and elsewhere, and his influence on the work of many younger artists is evident.

The china he decorated for Wedgwood from 1937 onwards was the work the public knew best, and in it he showed how well he was equipped with all the qualities a good designer needs: inventiveness, an understanding of the material he is working with, a sense of pattern, a good eye for the relation between surface decoration and shape. His designs were unmistakably his own, and in the years before the war Ravilious did more than anyone to show how grace and style can be given to a manufacturer's products without either falling back on imitations of the past or sacrificing that personal quality which we value in things produced by the past's more direct methods.

Besides being a born decorator, Ravilious was a remarkable craftsman with his own hands. He had an intuitive understanding of the possibilities of any medium he attempted. For example he decided to try his hand at lithography in 1936—having done virtually none before—and produced a series of lithographs of shops, drawn direct on the zinc plates in several colours, that showed a virtuosity and an appreciation of the effects that could be produced by superimposing colours which would normally be looked for only after years of practice. It is, of course, in his wood-engravings that his mastery of technique comes out most strongly, since this is an art dependent on sure control of the tool. His engravings

were never mere pictures transferred on to a wood block. As well as showing in them his inimitable wit and inventiveness in design, he was unrivalled in devising new textures and effects that yet never outrage the natural discipline of the medium.

Nevertheless, by the time he had completed his last big set of engravings—those for White's *Selborne*, published by the Nonesuch Press in 1938—he had turned away from wood-engraving. In spite of his facility as a decorator he thought of himself as first of all a painter. He had several exhibitions of water-colours—he did very little in oils—first at the Zwemmer Gallery and then at Tooth's where, in 1939, his work was shown for the last time except for those of his war paintings that were included in the official exhibitions of war-artists' work. Some of his most characteristic pictures were painted after his last exhibition, including his series depicting the figures cut in the chalk of the Sussex, Wiltshire and Berkshire Downs, a number of which are shown here. There must be about 150 of his water-colours surviving altogether, including about sixty war paintings, but unfortunately no record exists of where many of them are or who owns them.

Throughout his life his style of painting did not change much, though he widened his range as his very individual technique increased in assurance. By its means he was able in a remarkable way to bring out the essential characteristics of materials—the spikiness of rusty barbed wire, for example, in contrast to the sheen of Downland grass—and to render effects of light while seeming to restrict himself to local rather than atmospheric colour. His art is very English, belonging to that topographical tradition that combines a poetic vision with a special interest in the character of places. He painted much in

the Sussex in which he was brought up and to which he often returned. He also painted in Chiswick where he lived for a time after his marriage in 1930 to Tirzah Garwood, a fellow-engraver, and in Essex where he lived afterwards. He and his wife first went to Essex when they shared a house at Great Bardfield with Edward Bawden, who had been his contemporary at College and with whose development as an artist his own was closely linked. Afterwards they moved to Castle Hedingham and had their home there till just before he died.

Ravilious rarely painted abroad. Figures never played an important part in his pictures, but he liked painting the interiors of ordinary people's houses and the views through windows; also the bareness of winter landscapes and old machinery and outdoor still lifes in the shape of those casual assemblies of objects found in farm and junk yards. He had an affectionate eye for the oddity of such things; not in a whimsical way but simply because he respected clearly marked individuality wherever he found it. He liked things when they were most themselves; for example, when he became a war-artist the Walrus type of aircraft attracted him especially because it had not had the elementary charm of early flying-machines streamlined out of it.

More than with most artists, the subjects Eric Ravilious chose to paint were simply the things he liked, and they were therefore the things that reflect his personality, which was a rare and enchanting one with many facets, impossible to describe to those who did not know him. But at least his intense enjoyment of all the things he liked, whether strange or ordinary, shines out in his work.

J. M. RICHARDS

Catalogue

WATER-COLOURS

1. Wannock Dewpond. 1923. *Lent by Martin Hardie, Esq.*
2. Barns at Birling Manor. About 1925. *Lent by Mrs. Garwood.*
3. Pond, Half-past Seven. 1929. *Lent by Lady Sempill.*
4. Portrait of Edward Bawden. Winter 1929–30. *Lent by Edward Bawden, Esq., C.B.E., A.R.A.*

   One of the artist's few oil paintings. The rolls of paper are the cartoons for the murals at Morley College (since destroyed) carried out by Bawden and Ravilious.

5. The Training-ship 'Stork'. 1932. *Lent by Mrs. Garwood.*

6. Talbot-Darracq. March 1934. *Lent by R. C. Tuely, Esq.*

7. Dolly Engine. 1934. *Lent by the Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne.*

8. Poultry. October 1935. *Lent by D. King-Farlow, Esq.*

9. Floods at Lewes. 1935. *Lent by Lady Sempill.*

10. The Greenhouse, Firle. 1935. *Lent by the Tate Gallery.*

11. Furlongs. August 1934. *Lent by Mrs. P. Richards.*

12. Castle Hedingham. 1936. *Lent by James Shand, Esq.*

13. Wiltshire Landscape. 1937. *Lent by H. G. Strauss, Esq.*

14. Rye Harbour. 1938. *Lent by Eduard Le Bas, Esq., A.R.A.*

15. The Farmhouse Bedroom. 1938. *Lent by the Victoria & Albert Museum.*

16. The Yellow Funnel. 1938. *Lent by Sir Edward Marsh, K.C.V.O., C.B., C.M.G.*

17. Aldeburgh Bathing Machines. August 1938. *Lent by Miss Norah C. Jolliffe.*

18. The Garden at Furlongs. August 1939. *Lent by Mrs. R. C. Tuely.*

19. Interior at Furlongs. 1939. *Lent by Mrs. Swanzy.*

20. Westbury Horse. 1939. *Lent by Mrs. Swanzy.*

21. King George IV. 1939. *Lent by Mrs. Swanzy.*
The artist did a series of paintings of chalk figures.

22. Train Landscape. 1940. *Lent by the Art Gallery and Industrial Museum, Aberdeen.*

23. Passing the Bell Rock. 1940. *Lent by the Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield.*

24. Coastal Defences. 1940. *Lent by the Imperial War Museum.*

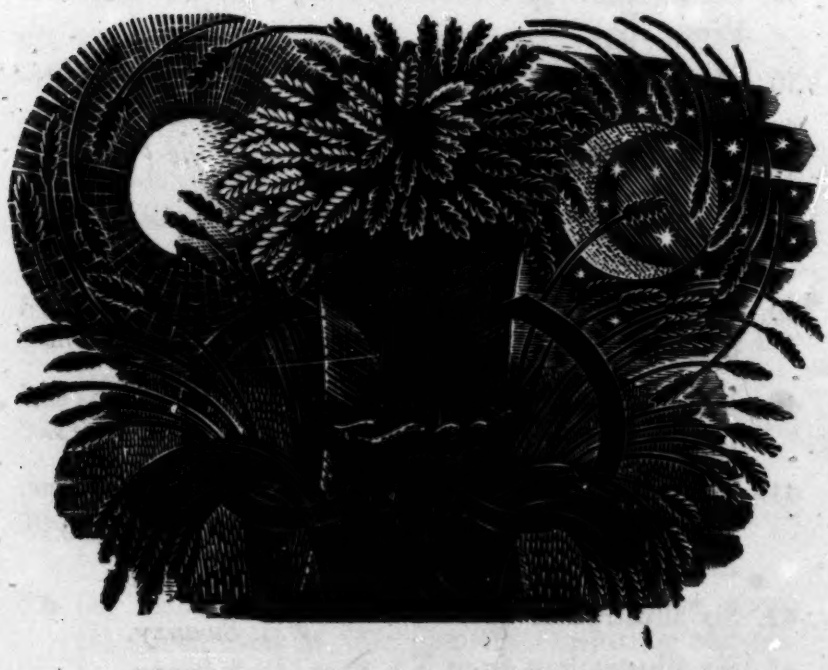
25. Shelling by Night. 1941. *Lent by the Tate Gallery.*

26. Drift Boat. 1941. *Lent by the Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield.*

27. Iron Bridge, Ewenbridge. 1941. *Lent by Mrs. Swanzy.*

28. Ironbridge Interior. 1941. *Lent by Mrs. Swanzy.*

29. R.N. Air Stations. 1942. *Lent by the Brighton Art Gallery.*



WOOD-ENGRAVINGS

ILLUSTRATIONS, MISCELLANEA

(*Unless otherwise stated, these are lent by Mrs. Swanzy*)

30. A. Smith, *The Atrocities of the Pirates*. 10 wood-engravings. Golden Cockerel Press, 1929.

31. Lanston Monotype Corporation, *Almanack 1929*. 12 wood-engravings. 1929.

32. Five wood-engravings of Signs of the Zodiac from No. 31.

33. W. Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*. 30 wood-engravings. Golden Cockerel Press, 1932. *Lent by Mrs. Garwood.*

34. Title-page and one illustration from No. 33.

35. *Consequences*. 2 wood-engravings. Golden Cockerel Press, 1932.

36. M. Armstrong, *Fifty-four Conceits*. Wood-engravings. Martin Secker, 1933. *Lent by Secker & Warburg.*

37. Four wood-engravings from No. 36.

38. L. A. G. Strong, *The Hansom Cab and the Pigeons*. 7 wood-engravings. Golden Cockerel Press, 1935.

39. T. Hennell, *Poems*. 4 wood-engravings. Oxford University Press, 1936.

40. J. M. Richards, *High Street*. 24 colour lithographs and 1 wood-engraving. Country Life, 1938.

41. G. White. *The Writings of Gilbert White of Selborne*. 2 vols. Wood-engravings. Nonesuch Press, 1938. *Lent by H. Carter, Esq.*

42. Six illustrations from No. 41.

43. Six illustrations from No. 41.

44. H. Monro, *Elm Angel*. 2 wood-engravings. Faber & Faber (No. 26 of the Ariel Poems), n.d.

45. (*a*) Trial engraving (not used) for an advertisement; (*b*) Trial engraving (not used) for 'August' in No. 31; (*c*) Proserpina; (*d*) Illustration from No. 44.

46. (*a*) Illustration from No. 39; (*b*) Engraving for The Curwen Press, 1933; (*c*) Cover for *The Village*, a journal of the National Council of Social Service; (*d*) Engraving for Southern Railway's pamphlet *Thrice Welcome*, 1935; (*e*) Title-page of No. 40; (*f*) Another engraving from 46 (*d*).

47. Kynoch Press Type Specimen Book. Page showing alphabet of initials. 1934. *Lent by H. Carter, Esq.*

48. B.B.C. pamphlet on British Art. 1934. *Lent by Philip James, Esq.*

49. Trade Card for Dunbar Hay, Ltd.

50. Cover design for *Curwen Press News Letter*, No. 6. 1934. *Lent by Philip James, Esq.*

51. *Kynoch Press Notebook* [and Diary]. 1933. *Lent by Herbert Simon, Esq.*

52. Six engravings from No. 51.

53. (*a*) Menu design for Double Crown Club, 1935; (*b*) Engraving ('Spring') for prospectus for *The Cornhill Magazine*, commissioned by John Murray, 1933. (See also No. 67*a*.)

54. Bookplates. (*a*) For Gwyneth Lloyd Thomas; (*b*) For Roger Bevan. 1932.

55. Cover design and engraving for Golden Cockerel Press prospectus. 1930.

56. Six illustrations from Ambrose Heath's *Country Life Cookery Book*. 1937.

57. (*a*) Illustration for W. de la Mare's *Five Eyes*; (*b*) Illustration of 'Dr. Faustus Conjuring Mephistopheles', from *The Legion Book*, 1929; (*c*) 'The Three Holy Children', from *The Apocrypha*. Cresset Press, 1929.

58. (*a*) *The Gallimaufry* [Royal College of Art Students' Magazine], 1925; (*b*) Sussex Church, from No. 58*a*; (*c*) The Church Under a Hill.

59. Symbols and engravings for announcements of Green Line bus routes commissioned by London Transport (see also No. 60). *Lent by London Transport Executive.*

60. Three announcements of Green Line bus routes.

61. Three illustrations for Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*. Golden Hours Press, 1933.

62. Eight tail-pieces for N. Breton's *The Twelve Moneths*. Golden Cockerel Press, 1927.

63. Two end-papers.

64. Eight proof-engravings.

65. Two wood-engravings. (*a*) Boy Bird's-nesting; (*b*) Roundabout, for a Golden Cockerel Press prospectus.

66. Decorations for Everyman's Library. *Lent by J. M. Dent & Sons.*

67. (*a*) Engraving ('Autumn') for prospectus for *The Cornhill Magazine*, commissioned by John Murray (see also No. 53*b*); (*b*) Prospectus cover for Golden Cockerel Press, 1932; (*c*) Design for dust-wrapper for Sir Osbert Sitwell's *Winters of Content*. Duckworth, 1932.

68. Three dust-wrappers. (*a*) R. Graves's *Collected Poems* (1914–47). *Lent by The Curwen Press*; (*b*) Everyman's Library, No. 977. *Lent by J. M. Dent & Sons.* (*c*) E. Waugh's *Remote People*. *Lent by Messrs. Duckworth.*

69. Four colour engravings for brochure of the Pavilion of the United Kingdom, New York Fair. 1939.

70. Four Christmas cards.

ORIGINAL DESIGNS

71. Design in pencil and water-colour for one of the wall-paintings ('A Lodging House') for Morley College for Working Men and Women. 1930.

These murals were destroyed by enemy action.

72. Design in water-colour and pencil for a bowl (never made) to commemorate the extension of the Underground Railway, 1935–40. *Lent by Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd.*

73. Design for tennis racquet display at Paris Exhibition, 1937.

74. Four drawings for a bowl, not yet produced, 'The Four Continents'. 1939. *Lent by Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd.*

75–77. Drawings in water-colour and pencil for Wedgwood ware.

78. Two water-colours for posters. (*a*) Greenwich Observatory; (*b*) Greenwich Pier. *Lent by London Transport Executive.*

79. Two water-colours for use with London Transport letterpress posters. (*a*) Football; (*b*) Ice-Skating. *Lent by London Transport Executive.*

80–82. Drawings in water-colour and pencil for a tea-set 'Escape or Travel', not yet produced. 1939. *Lent by Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd.*

The pattern paper used for the cover of this catalogue was designed by Eric Ravilious for The Curwen Press in 1926

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R. Y. GOODDEN, 'Eric Ravilious as a Designer'. Article in *The Architectural Review*, December 1943, pp. 155–61.

R. HARLING, *Engravings by Eric Ravilious*. Faber & Faber, 1946.

N. CARRINGTON, 'Eric Ravilious'. Article in *Graphis*, No. 16, 1946, pp. 430–35.

Other Arts Council Exhibitions

Some British Drawings from the Collection of Sir Robert Witt

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Euston Road School

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